

CLINTON HILL NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
26 Shanley Ave. Newark, NJ

Statement to Board of Education, made February 28, 1961

THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN CLINTON HILL
AND THE CONCLUSIONS WE DRAW FROM IT.

No neighborhood in Newark has a greater need for a major improvement in its educational facilities than Clinton Hill. Faced with a marked population increase between 1950 and 1960, the community notes that an unusually large number are children due to the fact that many younger couples have moved in.

The school plant in the neighborhood is outmoded. Clinton Hill schools have suffered severe pressure as a result of an inadequate number of classrooms to meet the increased enrollment and of an inadequate number of teachers. All three elementary schools (Bergen, Madison, and Avon) are on split-sessions.

1. Avon and Bergen schools rank among the top five in the city in enrollment increases since September 1959. In fact Bergen has shown the sharpest increase in the entire city.

2. Consequently Bergen has 14 split-session classes, Avon has 16, and Madison, the most recent addition to the list, has added 14 in the past year alone.

3. Since Avon's auditorium was converted to classrooms over a year ago, this school has been without an auditorium. Also, neither Bergen nor Avon have lunchrooms, let alone cafeterias. Children are forced to eat lunch in crowded grocery stores, corner candy stores, or worse, or even in time of icy sidewalks and piled up mounds of snow, they walk as much as seven blocks home and seven blocks back to school after lunch.

This shocking situation arises from the fact that many Clinton Hill mothers work and are unable to provide home cooked lunches. They must depend upon the schools for help, neither of which provides it.

4. In the split session classes enrollment exceeds 30 pupils and often 35, making virtually impossible decent learning and individual attention. Moreover, in some classes, two grades sit side by side with only one teacher. In such conditions, demands on the teacher are unreasonable. The teacher becomes a policeman. The special problems of each child cannot receive attention because the teacher has barely enough time to complete minimal requirements.

5. All three schools employ a high proportion of substitute teachers making difficult the maintenance of high pedagogical standards.

Council

The Clinton Hill Neighborhood has called this situation to the attention of this Board and to the Superintendent on many occasions, beginning three years ago.

The Council has sought a new school for the neighborhood and emergency relief for the present overcrowding. In over 15 appearances before this Board our representatives have documented the situation. Not once has any member of the Board challenged our facts. Neither has the superintendent questioned them. We presented 3,000 petitions asking for relief. We have met with school authorities on almost every level up to the highest.

To the demand that suitable temporary facilities be found in the community to provide additional classrooms, the superintendent has made an inadequate reply. We are aware that at its recent special meeting the Board approved certain proposals to construct

temporary classrooms in our area as well as additional classrooms in bordering areas. At the same time we are not satisfied that these measures will solve the immediate problem let alone the long-range problem. Most of the proposed construction would take one or two years to complete.

First, in regard to the immediate need to find split-level classrooms, the only suggestion which the superintendent made would have involved bussing our children to a distant school. This suggestion was overwhelmingly rejected by parents because they could not see it as a solution to their problem. It provided for no additional local facilities. It involved the younger children from grades 1 to 4. It was presented in an unpalatable manner which pointed dire consequences if a child missed his bus. It was a makeshift attempt to solve a long-range problem, not a real solution.

If the parents of Clinton Hill are to accept bussing, it will have to be to bordering communities. We are aware that Brough and Chancellor Avenue schools have room, that Mt. Vernon, Lincoln, and Alexander Street schools are underutilized, that Dayton has space too. We may accept bussing for a short time if safeguards are set up to insure that our children will not have to suffer in order to receive an adequate and equal education.

Now are we yet convinced that temporary facilities are unavailable in our own neighborhood. We are not aware that the superintendent has made a thorough, systematic study of existing structures to determine the feasibility of their use.

Second, with regard to the recent administrative recommendations that certain construction be undertaken in Clinton Hill and other areas, we wish to make some comments. We are extremely displeased that no recommendation was made for a new school in the Brough-Alexander districts, implementing this Board's own decision made last November and publicly announced.

We understand that a new school was proposed at this time because, according to Mr. Titus, the city is planning a substantial extension into Clinton Hill of a light industrial project between Aven and Hawthorne Avenues. To use Mr. Titus's words, "it is anticipated that about 800 children will be eliminated by this project." This reasoning rests on several dubious assumptions. Similar dubious assumptions were the basis for the administration's gross miscalculations of the redevelopment program so far as it affected school enrollment in Clinton Hill in the past three years. It was said to us that people would move back into the Central Ward as soon as the projects were ready. Events have refuted this dubious reasoning. Because many former Central Ward residents do not want to move back, Clinton Hill's population has continued to grow.

For three years we have suffered because of the administration's dubious reasoning. Now the city planner tells us that the light industrial project or project is still at least 5 to 10 years away. What kind of educational planning would permit us to continue to wait for 5 to 10 years?

Thus on the one hand we see the superintendent ignoring the consequences of redevelopment in the Central Ward to defer relieving the overcrowding in Clinton Hill, while on the other hand he accounts far-off proposals of a light industrial project as an excuse for not taking action for genuine long range relief at this critical moment. The city's redevelopment program, it seems, is a convenient excuse for refusing to face facts.

will for population stability, which we have every reason to believe will hold for the future, we face the real possibility that other parts of the neighborhood will grow even if the proposed light industrial project moves with lightning speed. If new housing is built within the 14-block urban removal area, or if residents from cleared areas move further west and south, then we can anticipate not a decline in population but a shift. In fact, this has been the pattern for some years. The relative decline in Central Ward population has been matched by increases to the south. We also mention the possible effects of the proposed South Broad Street clearance program on Clinton Hill's population. Apparently, while lay people can foresee such developments, the administration, armed with a research department, cannot.

We feel that we still need a new school in Clinton Hill, despite the superintendent's imperfect vision.

Third, another point which deserves mention bears on the ineffective planning by the school authorities. We note that several of the proposed additions will be built on playgrounds. We are sure that you Board members do not need us to tell you how important recreation is to the educational process. You recognize this fact by keeping the recreational department of the city under your wing. Still, despite Mark's grave shortage of recreational space, the superintendent has as yet offered no program for supplementing facilities in the face of their imminent shrinkage. Thus the manner in which construction will take place, as proposed, will solve one problem imperfectly and create another one.

The failure of the superintendent to make long range plans casts serious doubt on his competency to meet the challenge of our ever changing city. Development of large unit projects in other neighborhoods has not been coordinated with construction of adequate school facilities. Proposed projects in our neighborhood find him unprepared to foresee possible population movements in determining future plans. We submit that no administrator can afford to disregard the complex issues raised by redevelopment, population movements, and changing living patterns.

We have been told by you that the Board does not initiate action, that it moves on the basis of recommendations by the superintendent and his staff. We are told that the Mayor regards the Board as autonomous even though he appoints its members. He is reluctant to apply executive pressure in behalf of the people because, he says, it would mix politics with our children's education.

We therefore have concluded that full responsibility for the failure of this Board to act properly and decisively to solve the crisis in the Clinton Hill situation rests with the superintendent. We feel that time enough has been given to allow him to come up with well-reasoned, scientific plans for a solution.

We have seen some of the most civic minded residents leave because they felt that their children's education was so vital that they could no longer tolerate the overcrowded conditions.

We find that the rapid deterioration in Clinton Hill's educational standards has occurred coincidentally with the change of our neighborhood from a predominantly white area to an integrated one. Because it has been the proclaimed policy of our Council to preserve the integrated character of Clinton Hill, we have concluded that the school situation is a positive impediment to the achievement of our goal.

Moreover, we fail to see how the superintendent can remain indifferent to our plight in view of the million-dollar Urban

Renewal Project now entering its final planning stages. Poor schools detract from the fundamental principles of the program: namely, the preservation of decent neighborhood standards. As a member of the Newark Commission on Neighborhood Conservation and Rehabilitation, the superintendent should be acutely conscious of these principles.

We regard the solution to the school crisis as integral to the task of neighborhood preservation. Inferior schools make for transient and unstable communities. The rising aspirations of the people of Clinton Hill for their children will not permit them to stand idly by while their children are denied an adequate education. Inadequate cultural and intellectual standards in our schools intensify the process of decline. We have repeatedly mentioned to this Board and to the superintendent such programs as "Higher Horizons" and other means of incentives and curriculum enrichment, but he has shown no interest.

We feel that our community suffers from gross neglect. When split-sessions were introduced at Bergen and Aven we asked why there had been no planning. The superintendent replied that the population growth was unforeseen. That was three years ago, when those prophetic words were uttered. Yet the past three years has seen actions of various sorts to meet needs in other communities in Newark. Although we cannot pass judgment on the adequacy of those actions, we are happy that they have been taken. All we ask is equal treatment and equal education.

We have been patient. We have laboriously gone through channels. Thus far we are not getting satisfaction.

We feel that the record justifies our doubts about the superintendent's genuine concern for our neighborhood's schools. A superintendent has the responsibility of serving the needs of all sections of Newark, not just a few.

The superintendent's power to make recommendations and decisions which can affect the fate of whole neighborhoods should make his actions subject to this Board's searching scrutiny. We feel compelled, after long debate and thoughtful deliberation, to call into question the superintendent's competency in his job. We feel that he has failed in his public trust to serve the entire city equally.

I, therefore, in behalf of the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council, ask this Board of Education to inquire into Dr. Edward F. Kennolly's administration with a view to ascertaining his competency to continue as superintendent of schools.